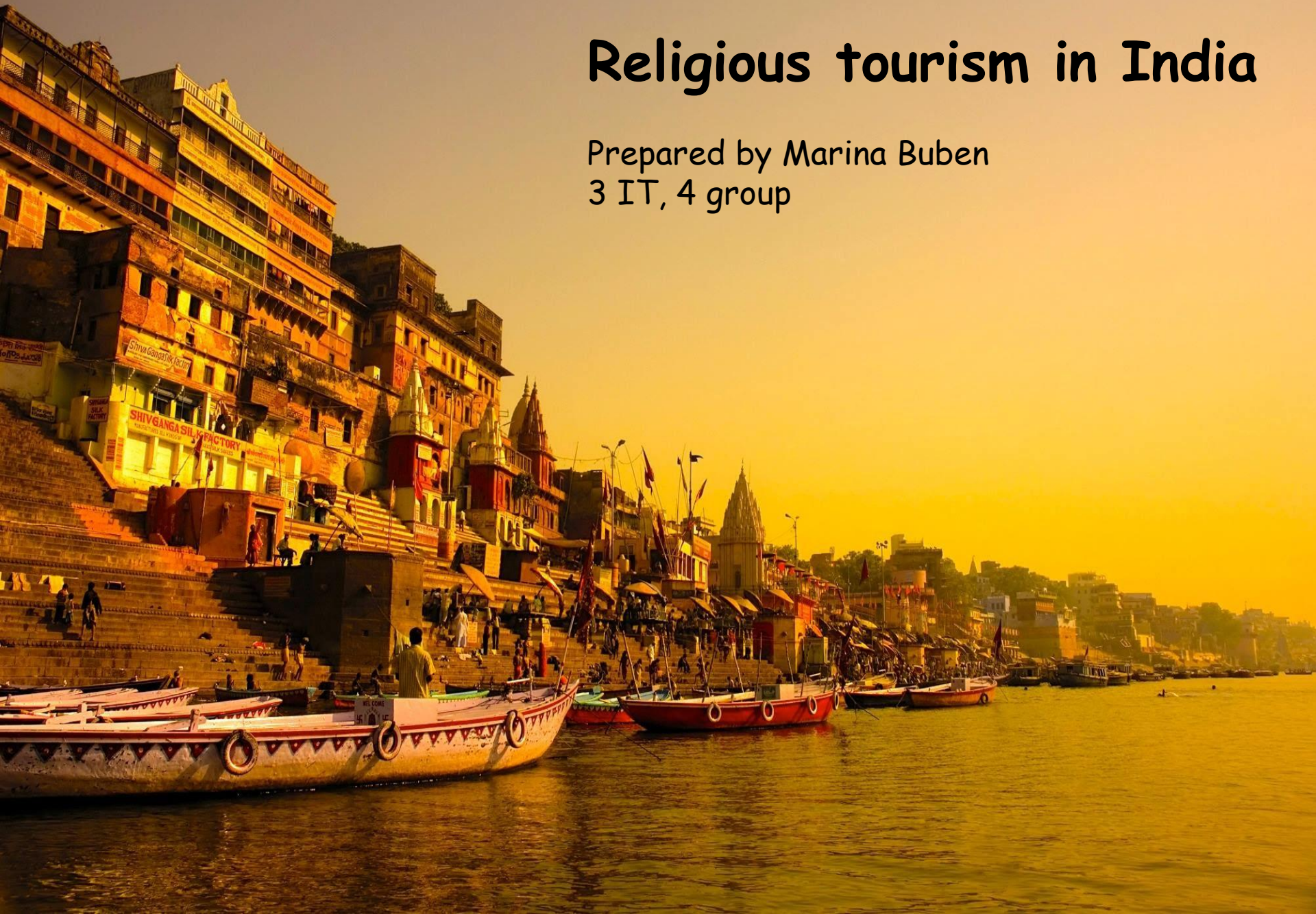


Religious tourism in India

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Religious tourism also commonly referred to as faith tourism, is a form of tourism, whereby people of faith travel individually or in groups for pilgrimage, missionary, or leisure (fellowship) purposes. Religious tourism has a big future in India. India is richly endowed with ancient temples and religious festivals. Religions originating in India, be it Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism or Buddhism, have a vibrant culture and spiritual philosophy. Together, they present a viable, alternative way of life as compared to the materialism and confrontation prevalent in the West.



India has long been known as a very spiritual, religious heavy area of the world. In India, religion is a way of life. It is an integral part of the entire Indian tradition. For the majority of Indians, religion permeates every aspect of life, from common-place daily chores to education and politics.



The religions of Indian origin are also proving to be an attraction to many persons of non-Indian origin because these religions advocate a pacifist and inclusive approach to life. This is evident from the posts that can be read on the numerous blog sites devoted to religion. And there can be no better way to introduce these aspirants to Indian religions than to entice them to come to India and undertake and experience religious tourism themselves.

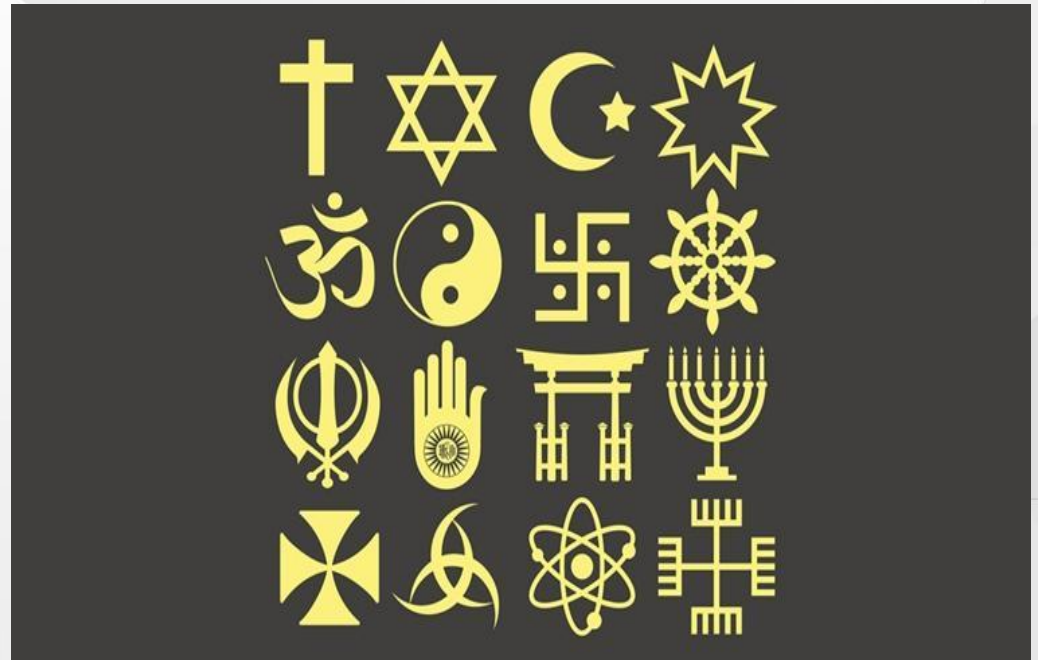
Hinduism is the dominant faith, practiced by over 80% of the population. Besides Hindus, Muslims are the most prominent religious group and are an integral part of Indian society.

Common practices have crept into most religious faiths in India and many of the festivals that mark each year with music, dance and feasting are shared by all communities.



Prominent religious spots in India:

- Hinduism
- Islam
- Buddhism
- Christianity
- Judaism
- Sikhism
- Zoroastrianism



Religious tourism comprises manyfacets of the travel industry

- Pilgrimages
- Missionary travel
- Leisure (fellowship) vacations
- Faith-based cruising
- Crusades, conventions and rallies
- Retreats
- Monastery visits and guest-stays
- Faith-based camps



For a number of foreigners, of course, especially those from across Asia, India is the land of Buddha - land that spreads over modern day Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in north India. Buddhist pilgrims from Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Sri Lanka and recently, Chinathrong these two states at any point of time in the year. They visit the banyan tree at Bodhgaya under which Lord Buddha attained enlightenment. They visit Sarnath, where Buddha gave his first sermon, and Kushinagar where he attained salvation.

23 million people visited Tirupati, a temple town near the southern tip of India to catch a glimpse of a deity known as Lord Balaji. Tirupati's annual list of pilgrims is higher than the total number of travellers visiting Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore and Kolkata put together. To manage such a large number of people, infrastructure has been beefed up by religious trusts, state governments, private chains and the central government.



There are no official statistics on the number of foreign Buddhist pilgrims visiting India, but industry sources believe that more than 2 million Buddhist pilgrims have been visiting India every year, considering that 84 per cent of Japan's population is Buddhist; 95 per cent of Thailand is Buddhist; 47 per cent of Korea is Buddhist and with Buddhism being the dominating religion in China, there is clear evidence many people from the People's Republic would like to visit India.

